

VIETNAM WAR

VIETNAM WAR began in 1957 when forces supported by Communist North Vietnam began attacking the government and its officials in South Vietnam. For the first few years, these forces consisted of guerrillas and terrorists commonly called the *Viet Cong* or *VC*. Viet Cong is a shortened form of the words *Viet Congan*, meaning *Vietnamese Communists*. Most of the Viet Cong's officers had been trained in North Vietnam and had later been sent secretly back into South Vietnam.

The Viet Cong were opposed by the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN). The ARVN received military and economic aid from the United States, including assistance from American advisers. In 1965, combat units of the U.S. Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard began to take part. Smaller units were sent from South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand. On the Communist side, the Viet Cong were joined by regular units of the North Vietnam People's Army (PAVN). Russia and China supplied the Communists with war materials but not troops.

The Communists called the struggle in Vietnam a *war of national liberation*. They accused the South Vietnamese government of being a "puppet" of the United States and pledged to overthrow the government. They wanted to unite Vietnam under one rule.

The fighting in South Vietnam started on a small scale. In time, it grew into a savage, full-scale war that threatened world peace. There was no fixed *front* (battle line). The Communists used guerrilla tactics, including ambushes and hand-laid bombs and mines (see GUERRILLA WARFARE). Non-Communist forces conducted air raids and "search and destroy" operations in which troops were transported by helicopters.

The United States never officially declared war. But the number of American troops in South Vietnam reached a peak of more than 543,000 in February, 1969. At the same time, there were more than 800,000 South Vietnamese and about 68,000 other non-Communist forces fighting an estimated 240,000 Communist guerrillas and regular troops. About 82,000 of the Communist forces were regular PAVN soldiers. Later in 1969, the United States began limited troop withdrawals. American withdrawals continued during the early 1970's, and the South Vietnamese began to take more responsibility in carrying on the war. In January, 1973, a cease-fire agreement was signed by the United States, North and South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong. The cease-fire ended U.S. involvement in the war. However, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong violated the agreement and continued to fight. The war ended on April 30, 1975, when South Vietnam surrendered to the Communists.

The United States and the War

U.S. participation in the Vietnam War became one of the most divisive foreign policy issues in United States history. Americans disagreed on both the objectives and the strategy of U.S. involvement. The war became increasingly unpopular as casualties increased and chances for victory appeared to decrease. See JOHNSON, LYNDON B. (The Widening Vietnam War); NIXON, RICHARD M. (Foreign Policy; Foreign Affairs).

Some Americans believed U.S. participation was

necessary to stop Communist aggression and to maintain U.S. honor and prestige. They argued that a Communist victory in South Vietnam would lead to Communist take-overs elsewhere. Some government leaders believed that the loss of South Vietnam to the Communists would mean all of Southeast Asia would fall to Communism "like a set of dominoes."

Other Americans believed that the conflict in Vietnam was a civil war in which the United States should not have become involved. Some maintained that U.S. security was not at stake and that the nation should not try to be a "world policeman." Others claimed that the U.S. armed forces were supporting a corrupt, undemocratic government in South Vietnam, and that the war was draining money away from vital U.S. domestic programs. Still others opposed the war because it resulted in hundreds of thousands of military and civilian casualties and left large areas of Vietnam in ruin.

Some military experts called for more U.S. military pressure. They argued that the Communists would give in only if the war were carried to North Vietnam by bombing or other means. Others disagreed, and wanted



The Vietnam War was fought mainly in North and South Vietnam. Troops also battled along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and Cambodia or flew missions from bases in Thailand.



Henry Gil

Non-Communist Forces battled in the air and on the ground to keep South Vietnam free of Communist control. Helicopters played an important part in the war. Pilots used them to transport troops and to seek out Viet Cong guerrillas in the forests and mountains. Helicopters carried the wounded to hospitals and brought food, ammunition, and medical supplies to field troops.

more emphasis placed on counter-guerrilla methods in South Vietnam. They also stressed programs of political, social, and economic reform to win the allegiance of the South Vietnamese. Some also feared U.S. bombing would bring China into the war.

Background of the War

The Indochina War. Before World War II, Vietnam was a part of French Indochina, which also included Cambodia and Laos (see INDOCHINA). During World War II, Japan occupied Indochina, but much of the area came under French control again after the war. Ho Chi Minh, Communist leader of the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Vietminh), became head of an independent government in northern Vietnam.

Disagreements soon arose between France and Ho Chi Minh. Fighting broke out on Dec. 19, 1946, and continued for eight years. The French were defeated in May, 1954, at Dien Bien Phu, and a peace agreement was arranged. A nine-nation conference meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, ended the war in Laos and Cambodia and divided Vietnam. The area in Vietnam north of the 17th parallel was controlled by Communists led by Ho Chi Minh. It became known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The territory south of the parallel became the Republic of Vietnam after



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Emperor Bao Dai was deposed in 1955. It was then ruled by President Ngo Dinh Diem, who had U.S. backing. The United States and South Vietnam did not sign the Geneva accords (agreements), but they announced their intentions to abide by them. See GENEVA ACCORDS.

The Geneva accords provided that the country must be reunified in 1956 through an election supervised by an international commission. But Diem refused to hold the election. Diem argued that free elections were impossible, because North Vietnam would not permit pre-election campaigning in its territory. He feared that the popular Ho Chi Minh would therefore receive most of the votes in the north, and the Communists would gain control of a united Vietnam.

The Early U.S. Role. In the early 1950's, the United States sent military supplies and advisers to French troops in Vietnam before their defeat. Following the 1954 Geneva agreements, President Dwight D. Eisen-

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hower pledged American support to the South Vietnamese. This support helped rehabilitate the country.

Diem stayed in power largely because of U.S. support. But his neglect of the peasants and the favoritism he showed his own family, particularly his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, made him increasingly unpopular. In 1956, Diem ended local elections and appointed his own village officials. Popular feeling against him mounted.

History of the War

The Viet Cong Raids began in early 1957. Guerrillas began to attack farm villages, particularly in the Mekong Delta. The Viet Cong guerrillas were under Communist control, but many of them were not Communist Party members. They fought against the South Vietnamese government because of its repressive measures and its failure to provide the people with the necessities of life. Some of the toughest Viet Cong had been fighting for about 20 years, first against Japan, then France, and finally against the Diem government.

By 1960, the Viet Cong had about 20,000 men. They were outnumbered by the South Vietnamese Army ten to one, but were strong enough to attack South Vietnamese forts and army units. They used guerrilla tactics, striking here and there unexpectedly. South Vietnamese troops tried to protect the entire country but failed.

The National Liberation Front (NLF), a political group, was organized in Hanoi in December, 1960, to support the Viet Cong. The NLF set up local councils to govern areas of South Vietnam controlled by the Viet Cong, built factories to manufacture weapons, and supplied ammunition, medical supplies, and money to the Viet Cong. Many of the VC's supplies and troops came from North Vietnam, chiefly over a system of roads and trails known as the *Ho Chi Minh Trail*.

By 1961, the Viet Cong had become so successful in South Vietnam that the U.S. was forced to choose between allowing the collapse of the South Vietnamese government and increasing its support. At that time, the United States had about 750 military advisers in South Vietnam. President John F. Kennedy ordered a step-up in military aid, including the increase of American advisers, technicians, pilots, and planes. By February, 1962, about 2,700 U.S. advisers had arrived. By November, 1963—when Kennedy was assassinated—there were about 16,300 U.S. military men in South Vietnam.

The Buddhist Crisis in 1963 heightened South Vietnam's internal troubles. The Buddhists claimed that Diem, a Roman Catholic, was treating them unjustly because of their religious beliefs. Some Buddhist monks burned themselves to death as a sign of protest. When special forces under Nhu raided and wrecked some Buddhist *pagodas* (temples), dissatisfaction with the Diem government spread. The United States criticized the Diem government and suspended certain types of economic aid to South Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese generals, encouraged by United States disapproval of Nhu's action, overthrew the Diem government on Nov. 1, 1963. Diem and his brother Nhu were killed the next day. A series of short-lived regimes governed South Vietnam until a military *junta* (committee) headed by Air Force Commander Nguyen Cao Ky came to power in June, 1965.

— IMPORTANT DATES IN THE VIETNAM WAR —

- 1957 The Viet Cong began to attack the South Vietnamese government headed by President Ngo Dinh Diem.
- 1963 (June) Buddhists in South Vietnam began large-scale demonstrations against the Diem government.
- 1963 (Nov. 1) South Vietnamese generals overthrew the Diem government, and Diem was killed the next day.
- 1964 (Aug. 7) The U.S. Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which gave the President power "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."
- 1965 (Feb. 7) President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered U.S. pilots to bomb military targets in North Vietnam.
- 1965 (March 6) President Johnson sent U.S. Marines to Da Nang, South Vietnam, to protect American bases there. The Marines were the first U.S. ground troops in the war.
- 1967 (Sept. 3) South Vietnam held the first elections under its new constitution, adopted earlier that year. Nguyen Van Thieu was elected president.
- 1968 (Jan. 30) The Communists launched the Tet offensive, a large-scale attack against 30 South Vietnamese cities.
- 1968 (March 16) U.S. troops killed hundreds of South Vietnamese civilians in the village of My Lai. One officer, Lieutenant William L. Calley, Jr., was found guilty of murder by a U.S. court-martial.
- 1968 (May 13) Preliminary peace talks between the United States and North Vietnam began in Paris.
- 1969 (June 8) President Richard M. Nixon announced that U.S. troops would begin to withdraw from South Vietnam.
- 1970 (June 24) The Senate repealed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution.
- 1973 (Jan. 27) The United States, North and South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed a cease-fire agreement in Paris.
- 1973 (March 29) The last American troops left South Vietnam.
- 1975 (April 21) President Thieu resigned.
- 1975 (April 30) South Vietnam surrendered to the Communists.

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident. On July 30, 1964, South Vietnamese naval craft raided islands in the Gulf of Tonkin north of the 17th parallel. Two U.S. destroyers were patrolling nearby. North Vietnamese PT boats, probably while pursuing the South Vietnamese, attacked the destroyers. Two PT boats were sunk. U.S. planes then bombed the PT boat bases. This was the first U.S. attack on North Vietnamese territory.

After the Tonkin Gulf incident, President Lyndon B. Johnson asked Congress for powers "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." Congress granted these powers by an overwhelming vote. Johnson used the resolution as a chief legal basis of U.S. support for South Vietnam in the war.

Escalation of the War. The war gradually grew in intensity. In late 1964, South Vietnamese morale was extremely low, and the United States began to consider bombing North Vietnam as a way of assisting. An attack on two U.S. camps at Pleiku in early 1965 triggered the decision. U.S. and South Vietnamese pilots then began bombing the infiltration routes and military installations in North Vietnam. For many years, the North Vietnamese had sent mostly former Southerners into South Vietnam. In late 1964, however, at least one North Vietnamese battalion was sent to South Vietnam. In midspring of 1965, following the bombing of North Vietnam, large numbers of North Vietnamese troops began arriving in South Vietnam.

In March 1965, President Johnson ordered U.S. Marines into South Vietnam to protect American bases there. These were the first U.S. ground troops used in the war. But the Viet Cong strength continued to grow, and it became doubtful whether the South Vietnamese forces could hold out through the summer. In July, Johnson ordered a build-up of U.S. forces in South Vietnam. General William C. Westmoreland took command of all U.S. troops in South Vietnam.

Full-Scale Combat. In 1966 and 1967, the fighting in Vietnam increased. Both sides enlarged their fighting forces, and casualties rose. Meanwhile, South Vietnam tried to establish a representative form of government. In 1967, voters approved a new constitution and elected a president, vice-president, and legislature. Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Thieu was elected president, and Ky became vice-president.

In 1968, the Vietnam War became the longest war in which the United States had ever been involved. In January and February of that year, the Communists launched large-scale attacks in South Vietnam, causing heavy damage and loss of life in Hue and Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). In one of the longest battles of the war, the Communists attacked the U.S. Marine base of Khe Sanh early in 1968. After a 77-day siege, the Communists withdrew. The Marines abandoned the base in mid-1968. In July 1968, General Creighton W. Abrams replaced General Westmoreland as commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam.

The Bombing Halt. On March 31, 1968, President Johnson announced a halt in the bombing of most of North Vietnam. The United States and North Vietnam began formal talks in Paris in May. The talks were aimed at reducing the level of fighting and arranging a peace settlement. On November 1, the United States halted all bombing and other attacks on North Vietnamese territory. The South Vietnam government and the Viet Cong joined the Paris talks in January 1969, but the negotiators made little progress.

Vietnamization. By March 1969, more Americans had been killed in combat in the Vietnam War than in the Korean War. More and more Americans became impatient for the war to end. In June, President Nixon announced the first of several withdrawals of U.S. forces from Vietnam. He said American troops would be replaced by South Vietnamese forces, which were being strengthened in numbers and fighting ability. This policy became known as *Vietnamization*. But many people were still dissatisfied. Demonstrations for peace took place in the United States on October 15, called Moratorium Day. On November 15, about 300,000 persons held an antiwar protest in Washington, D.C.

In April 1970, U.S. and South Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia to attack the North Vietnamese supply depots there. Nixon said the action would save the lives of American troops in South Vietnam and shorten the war. But many people felt that Nixon was widening the war. Antiwar protests broke out on hundreds of college campuses in the United States. All U.S. troops were removed from Cambodia in June 1970.

As U.S. troop withdrawals continued during 1970, the level of fighting fell sharply. But little progress was made at the Paris talks. In 1970, each side presented

peace proposals which were rejected by the other side.

Early in 1971, South Vietnamese troops invaded Laos in an effort to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail. U.S. forces provided air and artillery support. The South Vietnamese destroyed many enemy supplies, but they suffered heavy casualties and were forced to withdraw. Many U.S. planes were shot down. In 1971, the United States resumed the bombing of North Vietnam.

During 1971, both the United States and the Viet Cong presented new peace proposals. None of the plans was acceptable to the other side. Nixon announced in January 1972, that Henry A. Kissinger, his special assistant for national security affairs, had held 12 secret meetings with North Vietnamese diplomats in Paris between August 1969 and October 1971.

On March 30, 1972, North Vietnam launched a major offensive in South Vietnam. South Vietnamese troops were forced to retreat at first and lost much ground. In May, Nixon ordered the mining of North Vietnamese harbors to cut off North Vietnam's war supplies from Russia and China. At the same time, the United States stepped up its bombing of rail and highway networks in North Vietnam. By the end of August 1972, the Communist offensive had been halted.

U.S. troop withdrawals continued during 1972. Throughout the year, formal peace talks continued on and off in Paris. In addition, secret negotiations were resumed in Paris between Kissinger and North Vietnamese officials. In late October, Kissinger announced that "peace is at hand." But the talks broke down in December, and Nixon ordered full-scale bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong area. After 12 days, the bombing was called off, and the secret talks were resumed.

The Cease-Fire. Finally, on January 27, 1973, a cease-fire agreement was signed in Paris by the United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong. The cease-fire was to be supervised by joint military commissions of the parties signing the agreement and by an International Commission of Control and Supervision. The agreement called for the withdrawal of all U.S. and allied forces from South Vietnam and the return of all prisoners—both within 60 days. It also



WIDE WORLD
The War Ended when South Vietnamese troops, left, surrendered to Communist forces in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City).

VIGELAND, GUSTAV

called for the establishment of a National Council of Reconciliation and Concord to organize and carry out internationally supervised elections in South Vietnam. The first American prisoners of war were released on February 12. On March 2, the cease-fire agreement was endorsed by a 13-party conference in Paris. Participants in the conference included the foreign ministers of China, Russia, the United States, North and South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong. On March 29, the exchange of war prisoners was completed, and the last American troops left South Vietnam. However, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong violated the cease-fire agreement and continued to fight.

The End of the War came suddenly. South Vietnamese forces suffered a series of military setbacks in early 1975. By the end of March, they had lost about two-thirds of South Vietnam to the Communists. On April 21, President Thieu resigned. The war ended on April 30, when South Vietnam surrendered to the Communists. Two other Southeast Asian nations, Cambodia and Laos, also fell to the Communists in 1975. In 1976, the Communists united North and South Vietnam into the single nation of Vietnam.

About 57,000 U.S. troops died in the Vietnam War, including about 46,600 in combat. About 303,700 Americans were wounded and about 780 were missing. South Vietnam suffered about 254,300 troop deaths. North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troop deaths totaled about 1,027,100.

ROGER HILSMAN

See also HO CHI MINH; NGO DINH DIEM; NGUYEN VAN THIEU; VIETNAM; WESTMORELAND, WILLIAM C. For a *Reading and Study Guide*, see *Vietnam War* in the RESEARCH GUIDE/INDEX, Volume 22.

VIGELAND, GUSTAV. See NORWAY (Arts; picture).

VIGILANTE, *vij uh LAN tee*, is a member of a self-appointed citizen group or vigilance committee. *Vigilante* comes from the Latin verb *vigilare* (to watch).

During pioneer days of United States history, the authorities often found themselves unable to enforce the laws. Sometimes the only law officer for many miles around was the United States marshal, and it was impossible for him to police all his territory. In these situations, the citizens frequently formed vigilance committees which dealt out swift punishment to persons they considered to be offenders. Sometimes innocent persons were punished. But often the vigilantes were the only force to preserve order.

JOHN R. ALDRICH

VIGNY, *vee NYEE*, ALFRED DE (1797-1863), a French author, was a leading figure in the romantic movement. He is best known for his lyric and descriptive poetry. From his *Poèmes antiques et modernes* (1826) to *Les Dernières* (1864), Vigny's main themes include the solitude of men of genius, the alienation of God from man, the search for greatness through suffering and resignation, and the nobility of thought as expressed in philosophical poetry. His other well-known works include the play *Chatterton* (1835), the novel *Cinq-Mars* (1826), and a collection of tales, *Military Service and Greatness* (1835).

Vigny was born in Loches. He spent much of his life living in isolation on his estate. An unhappy love affair with an actress and his failure to win political office intensified his sense of loneliness.

JON A. HESTER

VIKING. See ROCKET (High-Altitude Rockets).

VIKINGS were fierce pirates and warriors who terrorized Europe from the late 700's to about 1100. During this period, daring Viking sailors also explored the North Atlantic Ocean and even reached America. Such deeds have given this period of European history the name *the Viking Age*.

The Vikings lived in Scandinavia, a region of Europe that includes what are now Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. The Vikings conquered or looted parts of England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Russia, and Spain. At first, they raided these areas to obtain loot. Later, they set up trading centers and trade routes. Viking ships carried settlers to Greenland, which was unknown to Europeans at that time, and to Iceland. Leif Ericson, a Viking explorer, landed in North America about 500 years before Christopher Columbus arrived there in 1492. The Vikings established a settlement in North America, but it lasted only a few years.

The name *Viking* did not come into use until after the Viking Age. It probably came from *Vik*, the name of a pirate center in southern Norway during Viking times. Among the Scandinavians, the expression *to go a-viking* meant *to fight as a pirate or warrior*. Other Europeans called the Scandinavians *Norsemen*, *Northmen*, or *Danes*. Swedish Vikings settled in eastern Europe, including part of what is now Russia. Some historians believe that the Swedes became known there as the *Rus*, and that Russia was named for them.

Few Scandinavians of the Viking Age spent all their time going a-viking. The majority worked most of the time as farmers or in other peaceful occupations. Today, however, most historians use the term *Vikings* for all Scandinavians of this period.

The Viking Age began after a long period of rapid population growth in Scandinavia. This growth reduced the amount of available farmland. It led many Vikings to leave Scandinavia to find a source of wealth or a new place to live. At the same time, Scandinavians developed new shipbuilding techniques that enabled their ships to travel farther than ever before.

The Vikings had no direct effect on the history of America. But their conquests in Europe influenced relations between England and France for hundreds of years after the Viking Age.

Viking Life

Ancestry and Population. The ancestors of the Vikings were Germanic peoples who once lived in northwestern Europe. Beginning about 2000 B.C., these peoples moved to what are now Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. A separate group of Vikings developed in each of these areas, but the three groups shared the same general culture.

The Vikings spoke a Germanic language that had two major dialects. All the Vikings understood both dialects. The Vikings used an alphabet made up of characters called *runes*. Each rune consisted chiefly of straight lines arranged singly or in combinations of two or more. See RUNE; KENSINGTON RUNE STONE.

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